Food Stamp Program

ILLINOIS
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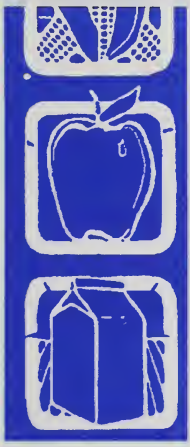

Illinois Department of Human Services

Food Stamp Program

The food stamp program is a federal nutrition program run by the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS). This program is for people who need help buying food for themselves and their children.

Food stamp benefits are delivered electronically through the Illinois Link card to help buy food.

How to apply for food stamp benefits

If you do not have enough money to buy food for yourself and your family and want to apply for the food stamp program, go to your local IDHS office. An employee at the office will ask you questions and enter your answers into a computer. You will be given a computer printout with your answers on it to sign. This is your food stamp application. If you are physically unable to come into the local IDHS office, an application will be mailed to you upon request.

If IDHS finds you eligible for food stamp benefits, you will be covered from the date your signed application is received.

Anyone can apply. You do not have to be receiving help from other IDHS programs to apply for food stamp benefits.

If you have questions or do not know where your local IDHS office is, call us toll free at 1-800-252-6154 (voice) or 1-800-447-6404 (TTY). An IDHS representative will give you the address and telephone number of your local office. If you are physically unable to go to the office, a caseworker will call you on the telephone and interview you.

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Information to take with you when you apply

When you apply for food stamp benefits, your caseworker will ask to see:

- Proof of the identity of the person making application
- Social Security numbers for you and your household members
- Paycheck stubs if you work, or proof of any other income or payments you receive and
- Records of your family's assets (such as checking and savings accounts and cash).

If you need help getting this information, your caseworker will help you. This information will help your caseworker understand your family situation better and figure out how much money you have available.

IDHS will review your food stamp application and all the information you give your caseworker. This may take up to 30 days. If your application is approved, you will receive food stamp benefits each month.

Every few months, your caseworker will ask you questions about your family and your income. This will help IDHS keep your records up to date and make sure you are still eligible for food stamps.

Eligibility for food stamp benefits

You may be able to get food stamp benefits in Illinois for you and your family if you:

- Are a United States citizen or meet certain nonresident requirements (ask your caseworker about these requirements) and
- Live in Illinois.

The Illinois Department of Human Services will decide if your household is eligible. Your household usually includes just you and your family. However, if other people live with you, they may also be included. Your caseworker will tell you who IDHS considers to be part of your household.

In most cases, your total assets can be no more than $2,000. Assets are things you own and the money you have. These assets do not include your home. If at least one person in your household is 60 years of age or older or has a disability, you can have up to $3,000 in assets.

If you are homeless

You may receive food stamp benefits even if you don't have an address but live in Illinois. If you are eligible, IDHS will make sure you get your benefits.

Your rights in the food stamp program

When you apply for and receive food stamp benefits, you have the right to:

- Be given or mailed an application the same day of your request
- Have your signed food stamp application accepted immediately
- Be issued food stamp benefits within a few days if you are in immediate need and are qualified for faster service

- Be notified in writing before your food stamp benefits are reduced or terminated
- Appeal any decisions made by IDHS
- Receive food stamp materials in Spanish and have an agency employee interpret for you if the adults in your family are fluent in Spanish but not in English, and you live in Cook, DuPage, Kane, Lake, Rock Island, Will or Winnebago Counties or you are a migrant farm worker in a county with a sufficient number of migrants.

If your application is turned down

If your food stamp application is turned down, you can appeal and ask for a fair hearing. At the hearing, you can explain why you think your application should be approved.

For more information about your right to appeal and receive a fair hearing, ask your caseworker or call IDHS toll free at 1-800-843-6154 (voice) or 1-800-447-6404 (TTY).

How the amount of food stamp benefits is determined

The amount of food stamp benefits you will get each month is based on the size of your household, your income and your allowable expenses.

Your caseworker will decide your allowable expenses by adding up the amount you are charged each month for your rent or mortgage, property taxes, owners' home insurance, utility bills, child care, child support payments and in some cases the medical bills of anyone in your household who is elderly or has a disability.

The food stamp benefits your household receives depend on the size of your household and the income you have left after your caseworker subtracts allowable deductions.

What food stamp benefits will buy

You can use food stamps to buy most food items. You can also buy plants and seeds to grow food. You cannot use your food stamps to buy hot prepared foods or non-food items. For more information about what you can and cannot buy with your food stamps, ask the store where you buy your groceries or call IDHS toll free at 1-800-843-6154 (voice) or 1-800-447 6404 (TTY).

Food stamps and other IDHS benefits

If you receive food stamp benefits, you will not lose the money you receive from other IDHS programs.

How to stay eligible for food stamps

Tell IDHS when you move

Tell your caseworker when you move so we can send important information to your new address. If you are homeless, tell your caseworker where you can be reached. If your caseworker cannot find you, your food stamp benefits will stop.

Keep your appointments with your caseworker

Try to keep all your appointments with your caseworker. If you cannot keep an appointment, tell your caseworker right away. Your caseworker will work with you to set up another appointment.

Report changes in your family situation
Tell your caseworker if there are any changes in your family size, the amount of money you receive (income) or the things you own (assets). A change may affect your food stamp benefits.

The law states that you must tell the department the truth about your family situation so that you get the right amount of food stamp benefits. You may face penalties if you break this law or help others to break it.

Other food and nutrition programs

Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Program
The WIC program is a special food program for pregnant and breast-feeding mothers and for infants and children up to age 5. The program can provide you with extra food that is good for you and information about eating right. It can help you stay healthy and help your child grow and develop properly by providing foods that contain vitamins and other important things the body needs.

For more information about WIC, call 1-800-323-4769, (voice and TTY).

The Emergency Food Program
The Emergency Food Program provides food to food pantries and soup kitchens for people who have run out of food or have an emergency need for food. For the location of the nearest food pantry and/or soup kitchen in your area, call IDHS toll free at 1-800-843-6154 (voice) or 1-800-447 6404 (TTY).

For more information:

Call or visit your local Illinois Department of Human Services office.

If you have questions about any Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) program, call or visit your local IDHS office. We will answer your questions. If you do not know where your local IDHS office is or if you are unable to go there, you may call the automated helpline 24 hours a day at:

1-800-843-6154

1-800-447-6404 (TTY)

You may speak to a representative between:

8:00 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.
Monday - Friday (except state holidays)

For answers to your questions, you may also write:

Illinois Department of Human Services
Bureau of Customer and Provider Assistance
425 South 4th Street
Springfield, Illinois 62701

Visit our web site at:

www.dhs.state.il.us

Illinois Department of Human Services

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